Transitioning Adolescents with Visual Impairment and Multiple Disabilities from School to Work

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The literature for adults with disabilities, including those with blindness and visual impairment, indicates that most are unable to secure meaningful employment in the community. This situation has been attributed in part to inadequate career education and job training in school. Indeed, many activities typical for the secondary level are nonfunctional, that is, they do not directly assist students in functioning in their day-to-day nonclassroom environments. Thus, the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children, with funding from the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Impairment, has developed a special program that targets job skills at community work sites. In particular, program participants have obtained food service and entry-level clerical jobs at businesses in their home neighborhoods, and have received individualized on-the-job training provided by job coaches. Through this approach, the likelihood of long-term employment for these students will be enhanced.

One student, Henry (a fictitious name), works at a Wendy's restaurant near his home. He is visually impaired and moderately mentally retarded. His job responsibilities include bussing tables, sanitizing trays, cleaning the bathrooms, and stocking the condiment bar. With feedback from his Job Coach, Henry quickly learned to carry out all steps in task analyses developed for each of his four jobs (see Figure 1). He also increased the speed with which he performed his jobs. (see Figure 2). In fact, his rate approached that

of a coworker who was nonhandicapped. Next, Henry learned to carry out his work tasks without the constant presence of his Job Coach. Currently, the Job Coach is not present for three jobs (bussing, cleaning, and stocking), and monitors the other from a distance of 20 feet. It is anticipated that Henry soon will be independent at the work site. Close relationships among program staff, Henry's family and employer, the School, and adult service agencies should increase the probability that Henry will be able to maintain employment at Wendy's.

Preliminary results of the job training program indicate that school-age students with blindness or visual impairment plus additional handicapping conditions can obtain and maintain competitive employment, with a Job Coach who provides initial one-to-one training and supervision. Paid work experience initiated during the high school years should facilitate the transition from school to work by providing job skills and, possibly, a place of employment. Integrated employment opportunities for these youths should heighten their quality of life by improving their financial status, their self-esteem, and their social contacts.

Figure 1. Multiple Baseline Analysis of Treatment for Correct Completion of Four Work Tasks. Specifically, Henry learned all of the steps of task analyses for the following jobs: Bussing Tables, Sanitizing Trays, Cleaning Bathrooms, and Stocking Condiments. Treatment was staggered across tasks and involved detailed feedback on performance provided by the Job Coach at the end of the work shift. Experimental control was demonstrated since Henry's work behaviors improved when treatment was introduced. Once Henry learned the tasks, the presence of the Job Coach was faded systematically.

Figure 2. Multiple Baseline Analysis of Treatment for Improving Rate of Completion of Two Work Tasks. Specifically, Henry increased the rate at which he bussed tables and sanitized trays. Treatment was staggered across tasks and involved feedback on rate of performance provided by the Job Coach following completion of one table or one stack of trays. In this case, experimental control was compromised since when Henry began to attend to time for one job (Bussing) he worked more quickly on the second job (Sanitizing). Henry's rate of performance approached that of a coworker (indicated by the dashed line) and was acceptable to his manager.

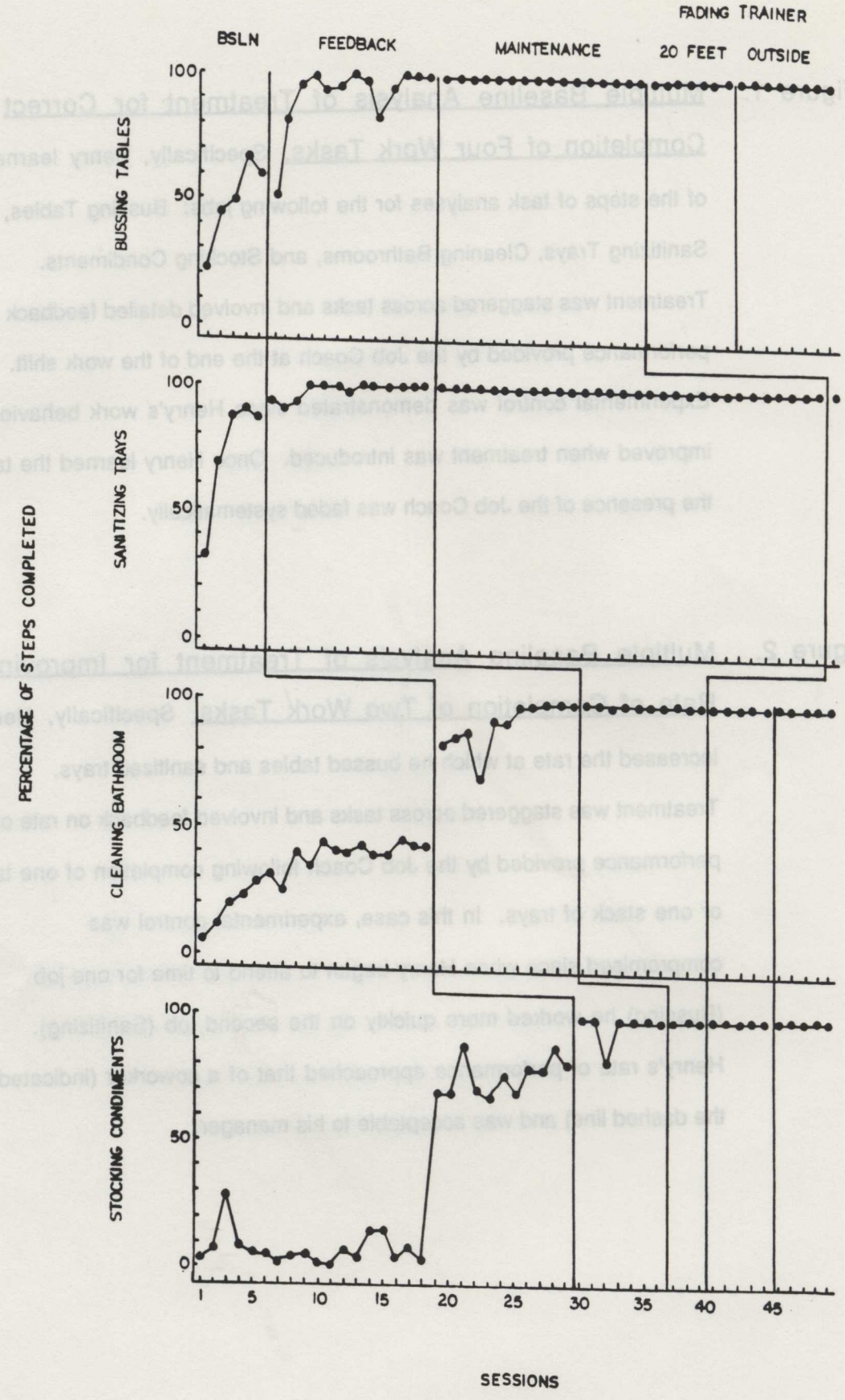
FADING TRAINER
BSLN
FEEDBACK
MAINTENANCE
20 FEET
OUTSIDE
BUSSING TABLES
SANITIZING TRAYS
CLEANING BATHROOM
STOCKING CONDIMENTS
PERCENTAGE OF STEPS COMPLETED
100
50
0
1
5
10
15
20
25
30
35
40
45
SESSIONS

Figure 1

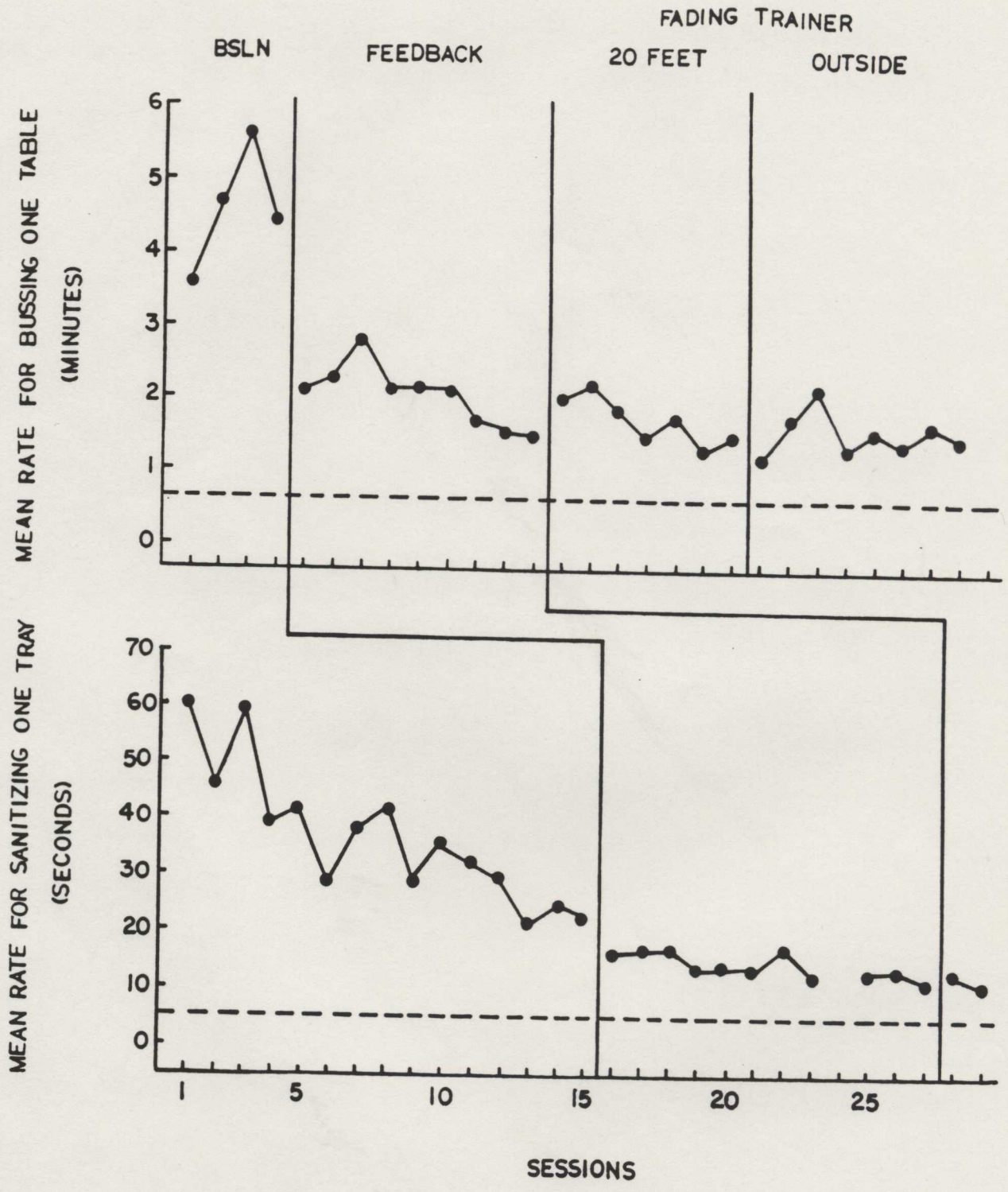
BSLN
FEEDBACK
FADING TRAINER
20 FEET
OUTSIDE
MEAN RATE FOR BUSSING ONE TABLE (MINUTES)
6
5
4
3
2
1
0
MEAN RATE FOR SANITIZING ONE TRAY (SECONDS)
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
1
5
10
15
20
25
SESSIONS

Figure 2